

Applied Psychology Review (APR)

Volume 1 Issue 1, Spring 2022


ISSN(P): 2959-1597 ISSN(E): 2959-1600

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/apr>



Article QR



- Title:** Dark Trait Tetrad and Online Deception in TikTok Users
- Author (s):** Rabia Farooq, Rabbia Ashraf
- Affiliation (s):** Fazaia College of Education for Women, Lahore.
- DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.32350/apr.11.02>
- History:** Received: December 26, 2021, Revised: May 12, 2022, Accepted: May 16, 2022
- Citation:** Farooq, R., & Ashraf, R. (2022). Dark trait tetrad and online deception in TikTok users. *Applied Psychology Review*, 1(1), 20–33.
<https://doi.org/10.32350/apr.11.02>
- Copyright:** © The Authors
- Licensing:**  This article is open access and is distributed under the terms of [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)
- Conflict of Interest:** Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



A publication of
Department of Knowledge & Research Support Services
University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

Dark Trait Tetrad and Online Deception in TikTok users

Rabia Farooq and Rabbia Ashraf*

Fazaia College of Education for Women, Lahore.

Abstract

The research aimed to assess the relationship between dark trait tetrad and online deception in TikTok users. It was hypothesized that there is a significant positive relationship between dark tetrad and online deception. Furthermore, the dark tetrad may significantly predict online deception in TikTok users. Moreover, there is a gender difference in dark tetrad and online deception in TikTok users. Correlational research design and Purposive sampling technique were used to collect data. The sample comprised $N = 100$ TikTok users constituting both Men ($n = 50$) and Women ($n = 50$). Dark Tetrad Traits Scale, Measuring of Online Deception and Intimacy Scale (MODI) was used to assess the targeted study variables in TikTok users. The results revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between Dark Tetrad and Online Deception among TikTok users. The narcissism and sadism subscale of Dark Tetrad came out to be positive predictors of Online Deception in TikTok users. While the result of the independent sample t -test indicated non-significant gender differences in Dark Trait Tetrad and Online Deception. This study will help provide the basis for further empirical research, about the etiological reason for antisocial behavior.

Keywords: dark tetrad, machiavellianism, narcissism, online deception, psychopathy, sadism

Introduction

The level of digital media consumption is constantly growing. More than 3.4 billion individuals, comprising 45% of the world's population, actively use social media (Karim et al., 2020). Figures published by Byte Dance's advertisement resources indicate that TikTok had 1 billion global monthly active users placing the 6th most active social media platform. 18.26 million users aged 18 and above are from Pakistan (Kemp, 2022). The prevalence of online social networks has given rise to the emergence of social media influencers (SMIs), so-called Internet celebrities. Social media influencers

*Corresponding Author: rabbia@fcoe.edu.pk

are online celebrities who exhibit their personal lives to their followers via social media. Social media influencers represent a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media (Mejia et al., [2020](#)). Media studies have analyzed that there is a huge impact of influencers' display of the luxurious life to which ordinary people can only aspire (Winch et al., [2012](#)). The purpose of the present research was to observe the relationship between dark personality traits and online deception in TikTok users and what makes this specific app user more stand out as compared to the others. The population of TikTok users were taken specifically for the research to find the essence of darkness in their personality and to which degree they use online deception.

Dark traits were first researched by Paulhus and Williams ([2002](#)). He defines how a person can have dark essences in their personality. According to them, a person with these traits has behavior tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness (Paulhus & Williams, [2002](#)). Dark tetrad refers to a collection of four socially offensive personality variables such as narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and sadism. These are known as the “dark” variables of the personality as these dark traits in personality have somewhat parallels to personality disorders of DSM-V, i.e. include major components of cluster B personality (Judge et al., [2009](#)). Paulhus et al. ([2021](#)) modified the dark personality triad by adding another dark personality factor “Sadism” in the previous personality dispositions toward moral and antisocial behavior and thus named them dark tetrad traits (Forsyth et al., [2021](#)).

A narcissistic personality disorder is defined by DSM-V (2013) in terms of the personality characteristics of vainglory, attention-seeking and terms significant disabilities in identity functioning such as looking too much to others for the direction of self-esteem, seeing oneself as uncommon, having impaired compassion, and having generally superficial connections (Rauthmann & Kolar, [2013](#)). Machiavellians, referred as master manipulators, comprises emotional and interpersonal highlights, as well as imprudent and introverted behaviors. They vary from narcissists in their particularly high scores on tests of manipulateness, and their inclination to be included in white-collar wrongdoing (Paulhus & Williams, [2002](#)). Psychopathy is derived from two words psych means “soul/mind” and pathy means “suffering/ disease”. People with this dark trait tend to have a lack of

empathy, impulsive behavior, aggression, lack of remorse and violent (James et al., [2014](#)). Sadism is defined as if a person feels gratification and pleasure by inflicting emotional or physical harm, pain, suffering, or humiliation on others especially sexual partners (Chester et al., [2018](#)).

Online deception is defined as a broad set of malicious practices that use the Internet as a medium to intentionally give a target an incorrect mental representation of the circumstances of social exchange (Rauthmann & Kolar, [2013](#)). People with dark traits tend to deceive more on social media platforms (Craker & March, [2016](#)). It's believed to happen more with people who develop to have dark traits in their personality and are likely to deceive online. This includes deceptive behavior like using fake names, photos and biographies which is often used for romantic online relations (Toros, [2021](#)).

In Pakistan, young adults are getting very obsessed with social media like TikTok. Figures published in ByteDance's advertising resources indicate that TikTok had 18.26 million users aged 18 and above in Pakistan in early 2022 (Kemp, [2022](#)). In order to get fame overnight majority of them tend to use harsh, Machiavelli and controversial content to get attention, which shows the fragment of darkness in their personality. Thus, the present study aimed at finding the relation between these two variables to explore the relationship between dark tetrad and online deception among TikTok users.

Previous research indicates that individuals with dark personalities tend to manipulate online platforms like Machiavelli's personality individuals tell wrong information about others (Dryden & Anderson, [2019](#)), narcissistic personality individuals use online media to spread fake accidents, fake possession, or even fake injuries to scandalize themselves (Sabir et al., [2020](#)). Sadistic traits people find it exciting to be hurt by harsh comments and abusive language to such a degree that they even encourage others to commit suicide. Psychopaths are very aggressive on social media platforms that they manifest amoral and introverted behavior (Li et al., [2020](#)). Hence, it is believed that these two variables have a very strong relationship.

There is an evidence that Machiavellianism and psychopathy, in particular, are related to the frequency and amplitude of interpersonal deception creation (Baughman et al., [2014](#)). Contrarily, narcissism is linked

to self-deception and intrapersonal dishonesty (Paulhus & Williams, [2002](#)). Risk level, ego depletion, and deception target are three contextual factors that have been found to affect the Dark Triad characteristics of dishonest conduct (Azizli et al., [2016](#); Jones & Paulhus, [2017](#)). A study that measured the Dark Triad traits, as well as testosterone and cortisol levels before and after a deception production task, discovered a physiological response pattern: testosterone increased post-test for narcissists and psychopaths and cortisol levels decreased for men high in Machiavellianism (Chester et al., [2018](#)).

Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are popular routes of communication for individuals all over the world. Even though users typically tend to portray a truthful picture of themselves on these platforms, Huetter et al. ([2020](#)) have urged greater research into certain types of impression management and individual variations in this behavior. Men are more inclined to lie, according to Dreber and Johannesson ([2008](#)), although Winch ([2012](#)) and Gylfason et al. ([2013](#)) did not identify any variations in deceptive behavior by gender. Similarly, research also demonstrated that men often score higher than women on Dark Triad scales (Sabir et al., [2020](#)).

Hypotheses

H1: There is a positive relationship between dark tetrad and online deception in TikTok users.

H2: Dark traits tetrad positively predict online deception in TikTok users.

H3: There is a gender difference between dark terdad and online deception among TikTok users.

Method

Research Design

The present research implies a correlation research design to find the relationship between dark tetrad and online deception in TikTok users.

Sample

The study took a total sample of $N = 100$ ($M_{age}=21.13$, $SD = 3.09$) TikTok users. The study included only those TikTok users who have been actively making and posting videos on the application for more than six

months. The population who were viewing the videos were not included in the research. The sample comprised both men ($n = 46$) and women ($n = 54$) TikTokers. The study used a purposive sampling approach to collect data online through Google Forms. The average number of hours spent online was $M = 5.58$ and the average number of hours spent on TikTok was $M = 8.17$. The majority had BSc level education and belonged to the nuclear family system (66%) as compared to the joint family system.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Variables	<i>f</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age		21.13	3.09
Number of hours spend Online on TikTok app		5.58	4.00
		8.17	5.236
Gender			
Male	46		
Female	54		
Family system			
Nuclear	34		
Joint	66		

Assessment Measures

Personal Information Sheet

It was developed by the researcher and consisted of information regarding the participant's gender, age, education, marital status, number of siblings, family system, employment status, birth order, number of hours spent online, and number of time spend on the TikTok app.

Short Dark Tetrad (SD4)

The short dark tetrad (SD4) scale, developed by Paulhus et al. (2020), is the most worldwide scale for measuring personality with dark traits. The scale consists of 37 items like "Whatever it takes, you must get the important people on your side" and 4 subscales (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, sadism). Respondents rate their agreement with the statement on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). High scores, on the scale, indicate having high levels of that

personality traits. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the present study was reported to be good ranging from .62 to .87.

Measuring Online Deception and Intimacy (MODI)

MODI (Stanton et al., 2016) is the most worldwide scale for measuring deception and intimacy on online platforms. This scale consists of 10 items for example "I find a sense of excitement in misrepresenting myself to others online". Respondents rate their agreement with the statement on a 5-point scale (1= *Not at all like me* to 5 = *Very much like me*) with high scores on the scale indicate high behavior of deceiving online and low scores on the scales indicate low online deception behavior. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the present research was excellent ($\alpha = .82$).

Procedure

At first, permission was taken from the college principal and the head of the department. After the topic was finalized by the reviewer board of the college, permission was taken from the original author of the tool used in the study. Afterward, as the research requirement, the questionnaire was designed on google form to collect data online from participants and they were approached based on the research inclusion and exclusion criteria. The researchers assured the participants about the confidentiality of the knowledge obtained from them. Researchers clearly explained the aim and purpose of the study. Consent was taken from the participants, the consent form was attached to the questionnaire. The researcher was available online to answer the queries of participants about the questionnaires. An average time of 15 minutes was taken to fill out the questionnaire for each participant. After the whole data collection, data were analyzed using IBM SPSS 22. All the data was collected in two months.

Ethical Consideration

The study followed all ethical considerations according to the guidelines of APA (American psychological association) ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct section 8 (research and publication) including taking formal permission from the principal, head of department and supervision. Full consent was taken from the participant. Participants' data were kept confidential. Participants filled in the form voluntarily.

Results

It was hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between the dark traits tetrad and online deception in TikTok users. Pearson product movement correlation was used to find the relationship between the study variables.

Table 2

Correlation among Dark Trait and Online Deception Variables (N=100)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	M	SD
1. Age	-	.36**	.15	.24*	.19	.32**	21.13	3.09
2.Machiavellianism		-	.51**	.54**	.45**	.45**	25.90	4.74
3.Narcissism			-	.62**	.54**	.52**	24.78	5.45
4.Psychopathy				-	.75**	.69**	21.76	6.41
5.Sadism					-	.77**	21.39	7.38
6.Online deception						-	28.82	8.59

Note. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$.

The result has been shown in Table 2. The result shows that dark tetrad is positively correlated with online deception. Machiavellianism subscale of dark tetrad positively correlates with online deception. The narcissistic subscale also shows a positive correlation with online deception. The psychopathy subscale of dark tetrad shows a significantly positive correlation with online deception. Moreover, the sadism subscale of the dark tetrad is also significantly positively correlated with online deception.

Table 3

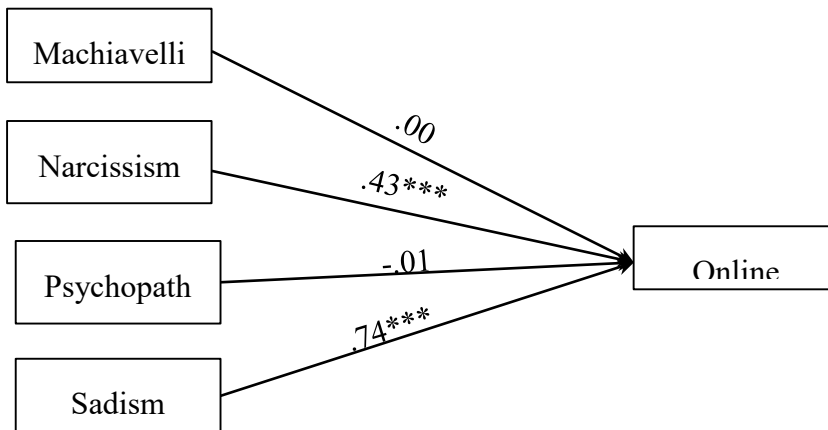
Dark Tetrad Predicting Online Deception in TikTokers

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Constant	3.74	3.18	1.17	.24	[-2.59,-10.07]
Machiavellianism	.00	.14	.01	.98	[-.28,.28]
Narcissism	.43	.15	2.91	.00	[.14,.73]
Psychopathy	-.01	.14	-.07	.93	[-.29,.26]
Sadism	.75	.12	6.02	.00	[.50,.99]

Table 3 shows that the narcissism and sadism positively predicted online deception in TikTok users. The model explained a variance of 64% and $F = (4,95) 42.78, p < .001$.

Figure 1

Emergent Regression Model Showing Dark Tetrad Traits as A Significant Predictor of Online Deception

**Table 4**

Gender Difference between Dark Tetrad and Online Deception in TikTok Users

Variables	Men (n= 46)		Women (n= 54)		t	p	95 % CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD					
Dark tetrad									
Machiavellianism	26.10	5.20	25.72	4.35	.40	.68	-1.51	2.28	0.07
Narcissism	24.95	6.09	24.62	4.90	.29	.76	-1.85	2.50	0.05
Psychopathy	22.76	7.23	20.90	5.55	1.4	.15	-.68	4.39	0.28
Sadism	21.60	8.41	21.20	6.47	.27	.78	-2.55	3.36	0.05
Online deception	29.26	9.35	28.44	7.97	.47	.63	-2.62	4.25	0.094

It was hypothesized that there is a significant gender difference among study variables independent sample t-test was used to measure gender difference in TikTok users' results has been shown in table 4. Results found non-significant gender differences among study variables.

Discussion

The present study was conducted to find out the relationship between Dark tetrad (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, and sadism) and online deception in TikTok users. This study was designed to investigate the relationship between dark tetrad and online deception in TikTok users the total no. of adults 100 were taken of which 50 were men and 50 were women.

It was hypothesized that there is likely to be a positive relationship between dark traits tetrad and online deception in TikTok users. The first hypothesis was accepted as dark tetrad and its subscale (Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, and sadism) were positively correlated with online deception. This showed that individual who uses more TikTok are likely to have dark personalities and tend to deceive more.

The results of the study are supported by the previous findings showing that the Dark Tetrad characteristics are related to Cyberbullying and cyberstalking (Kircaburun et al., [2018](#)). Wissing and Reinhard ([2019](#)) also found a positive relationship between dark triad personality with deception perception in adults. Jonason et al. ([2014](#)) found that the dark triad traits were linked to the use of various intersexual and intrasexual deception tactics but these differed as a function of the domain, the category of deception, and the particular tactic used such as lies for dominance, exploitive nature, cheating strategies, and sexual intentions

Second hypothesis state that dark tetrad significantly predicts online deception in TikTok users. Results showed that narcissism and sadism subscale of the dark tetrad, positively predicted online deception. This suggests that TikTok users who possess narcissistic and sadistic traits had a greater tendency to deceive online. This means that individuals with dark traits like narcissism and sadism would likely promote egotism or self-admiration of one's image, cyberbullying, spreading hate videos, hate commenting, and racial discrimination on the online platform. Previous research (Kircaburun et al., [2018](#)) has also evidence that the sadism personality trait was related to different types of pathological online activities like excessive social media use, online cheating, and online sex which have the potential to cause harm to another person. According to Kircaburun et al. ([2018](#)) sadists try to compensate for their need for cruelty by using deceptive measures on online platforms. This show that the person

who possesses a feeling of pleasure in inflicting harm or hurting others, tends to manipulate online and deceive other internet users. Furthermore, Craker and March (2016) found in their study that psychopathy and sadism traits were more likely to be involved in Facebook trolling practices.

The third hypothesis states there is a gender difference between dark tetrad and online deception in TikTok users. Results showed that there are non-significant gender differences in dark traits and online deception between men and women. This can be due to the reason that both genders act the same under similar circumstances and tend to mislead in the same pattern. In this case of gender, no significant gender difference was found this can be due to a small sample size but another demographic variable significant difference may be found. Eagly (2009) found in his study that young adult is more on social media platform and values expose to more negative things which lead the individual to act and think in the same way without any gender difference.

Conclusion

Dark tetrad traits have a significant positive relationship with online deception in TikTok users. Narcissism and sadism of dark tetrad positively predicted online deception in TikTok users. There is no gender difference between dark tetrad and online deception in TikTok users.

Limitations and Recommendations

In the present study, the sample was small (i.e. $n = 100$) and was specific to only the Pakistani community. Upcoming studies should be led with a large sample size so that generalized of the study would be increased or can be studied with other populations like adolescence. Data were collected from only one city which limits generalization, so further research should be conducted in different cities other than Lahore for a more diverse approach. The study consisted of only one application (TikTok) so the generalization of this study's results on other social media applications is limited, so future studies can focus on other social media applications like Instagram or Facebook

Implications

Despite of limitation, this study has some implication as it helps us to understand the relationship of the targeted variables and to over-rule them in future. There is limited work on these variables in relation to other

demographic variables like age, time spend on social media. The study helped to develop a research instrument that is more related to our cultural values. This study can give benefit to all those researchers who want to find the comparison between Dark traits and online deception among different social media apps.

References

- Azizli, N., Atkinson, B. E., Baughman, H. M., Chin, K., Vernon, P. A., & Harris, E. (2016). Lies and crimes: Dark triad, misconduct, and high-stakes deception. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *89*, 34–39. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.09.034>
- Baughman, H. M., Jonason, P. K., Lyons, M., & Vernon, P. A. (2014). Liar liar pants on fire: Cheater strategies linked to the Dark Triad. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *71*, 35–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.07.019>
- Chester, D. S., DeWall, C. N., & Enjaian, B. (2018). Sadism and aggressive behavior: Inflicting pain to feel pleasure. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *45*(8), 1252–1268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167218816327>
- Craker, N., & March, E. (2016). The dark side of Facebook: The dark tetrad, negative social potency, and trolling behaviours. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *102*, 79–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.06.043>
- Dreber, A., & Johannesson, M. (2008). Gender differences in deception. *Economics Letters*, *99*(1), 197–199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2007.06.027>
- Dryden, C., & Anderson, J. (2019). The dark triad, trait-based self-objectification, and body image concerns in young women. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *145*, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2019.03.015>
- Eagly, A. H. (2009). The his and hers of prosocial behavior: An examination of the social psychology of gender. *The American Psychologist*, *64*(8), 644–658. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.64.8.644>
- Forsyth, L., Anglim, J., March, E., & Bilobrck, B. (2021). Dark Tetrad personality traits and the propensity to lie across multiple contexts.

- Personality and Individual Differences*, 177, 110792.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.110792>
- Gylfason, H. F., Arnardottir, A. A., & Kristinsson, K. (2013). More on gender differences in lying. *Economics Letters*, 119(1), 94–6.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2013.01.027>
- Huetter, F. K., Moehlendick, B., Knop, D., & Siffert, W. (2020). Lack of association of common polymorphisms linked to empathic behaviour with self-reported trait empathy in healthy volunteers. *Hormones and Behavior*, 126, 104841. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yhbeh.2020.104841>
- James, S., Kavanagh, P. S., Jonason, P. K., Chonody, J. M., & Scrutton, H. E. (2014). The dark triad, schadenfreude, and sensational interests: Dark personalities, dark emotions, and dark behaviours. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 68, 211–216.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.04.020>
- Jonason, P. K., Lyons, M., Baughman, H. M., & Vernon, P. A. (2014). What a tangled web we weave: The dark triad traits and deception. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 70, 117–119.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.06.038>
- Jones, D. N., & Paulhus, D. L. (2014). Introducing the short dark triad (SD3): A brief measure of dark personality traits. *Assessment*, 21(1), 28–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1073191113514105>
- Judge, T. A., Piccolo, R. F., & Kosalka, T. (2009). The bright and dark sides of leader traits: A review and theoretical extension of the leader trait paradigm. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 20(6), 855–875.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2009.09.004>
- Karim, F., Oyewande, A. A., Abdalla, L. F., Chaudhry Ehsanullah, R., & Khan, S. (2020). Social media use and its connection to mental health: A systematic review. *Cureus*, 12(6), e8627.
<https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.8627>
- Kemp, S. (2022, February 16). *Digital 2022: Pakistan*. Data Reportal.
<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-pakistan>
- Kircaburun, K., Jonason, P. K., & Griffiths, M. D. (2018). The dark tetrad traits and problematic social media use The mediating role of

- cyberbullying and cyberstalking. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 135, 264–269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.07.034>
- Mejia, C. R., Roberto, T. P. M., Dayana, T., Franco, R. A. J., Campos-Urbina Alejandra, M., Catay-Medina Jhordan, B., & Felipe, C. E. R. (2020). The media and their informative role in the face of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): Validation of fear perception and magnitude of the issue (MED-COVID-19). *Electronic Journal of General Medicine*, 17(6), em239. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejgm/7946>
- Paulhus, D. L., & Williams, K. M. (2002). The Dark Triad of personality: narcissism, machiavellianism, and psychopathy. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 36(6), 556–563. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0092-6566\(02\)00505-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0092-6566(02)00505-6)
- Paulhus, D. L., Buckels, E. E., Trapnell, P. D., & Jones, D. N. (2021). Screening for dark personalities: The short dark tetrad (SD4). *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 37(3), 208–222. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1015-5759/a000602>
- Sabir, I., Nasim, I., Majid, M. B., Mahmud, M. S. B., & Sabir, N. (2020). TikTok addictions and its disorders among youth of Pakistan. *Scholedge International Journal of Multidisciplinary & Allied Studies*, 7(6), 140–146. <https://doi.org/10.19085/sijmas070602>
- Stanton, K., Ellickson-Larew, S., & Watson, D. (2016). Development and validation of a measure of online deception and intimacy. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 88, 187–196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.09.015>
- Toros, S. (2021). Deceptive tactics used in online shopping. *Transnational Marketing Journal*, 9(2), 407–424. <https://doi.org/10.33182/tmj.v9i2.1255>
- Winch, A. (2012). “We Can Have It All.” *Feminist Media Studies*, 12(1), 69–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2011.558349>
- Wissing, B. G., & Reinhard, M. A. (2019). The dark triad and deception perceptions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, e1811. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01811>